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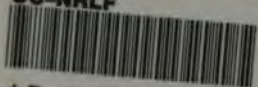
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The
Steadfast
Princess

..

Cornelia L. Meigs



THE STEADFAST PRINCESS



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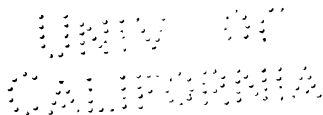
THE STEADFAST PRINCESS

A PLAY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

BY

CORNELIA MEIGS

AUTHOR OF "THE KINGDOM OF THE WINDING ROAD"



New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1916

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The Steadfast Princess won the Drama League prize of one hundred dollars, offered by Kate Oglebay, National Chairman of Junior Work, the publication being assured by The Macmillan Company, for the best play for children submitted in 1915. The judges were William Bohn, Edna Fisher Braucher, Percival Chubb, Rachel Crothers, H. S. Latham, Constance D'Arcy Mackay, and Kate Oglebay.

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THE STEADFAST PRINCESS



CHARACTERS

THE TOYMASTER.

URSULA, *his adopted daughter.*

GRETCHEN, *his servant.*

HANS, *Gretchen's grandson.*

JOHANNAS KRAFT } *King's Councillors.*
NICHOLAS HALM }

THE PRINCE OF ASTANCIA.

AMBASSADOR FROM ASTANCIA.

THE GARDENER.

TWO SENTRIES.

A PEASANT WOMAN AND HER TWO CHILDREN.

A DOG.

CHILDREN—FAIRIES—COURTIERS—SOLDIERS—SERVANTS,
ETC.

Four months elapse between Acts I and II.

THE STEADFAST PRINCESS

ACT I

Workshop room in the TOYMASTER's cottage. At the back of the stage, in the centre is a great fireplace, with high, blackened wood mantel, holding shining copper and pewter cups. At right and left of the fireplace, extending out at an angle, two high-backed settles. On each side of the fireplace are wide casement windows, with red curtains, broad sills, and in the window at the right, a row of gay blooming plants in red pots.

On the right, nearest the front of the stage, is a small iron-bound chest with elaborate lock and hinges. In the centre of the right wall is a door, standing open. Beyond is a very large box, made of rough wood, ready to hold the wares that the TOYMASTER is sending to the Christmas market. It has a hinged cover, stands against the wall, and is so large that entrances and exits can be made through the back of it. In the corner is a large rocking-horse.

On the left, nearest the front, is a work-bench, littered with tools, unfinished toys, pots of paint, etc. Two stools, a high and a low one, stand before it. Beyond in the centre of the left wall, is a closed door, leading

2. THE STEADFAST PRINCESS

out-of-doors. Next to the door is a great box like the one on the right. In the corner is a tall clock. The fire on the hearth is low. The time is very early on a winter's morning in the midst of a furious snow-storm. As the curtain rises, old GRETCHEN is hobbling toward the outer door at the left, which shakes in the wind, and from outside of which comes a loud sound of whining and scratching.

GRETCHEN

[Opening the door and admitting a large shaggy dog, covered with snow, who rushes across and out at the door opposite, while with him comes in a blast of wind and wet.]

Come in, come in, keep me not here all day!
'Tis not enough you break my morning's sleep
With whining at the door long ere the dawn,
But you must needs bring in the snow and wet,
Make muddy foot-prints on my new-scrubbed floor.
Did e'er one see the like! Where is my broom?

[She hobbles after the dog and goes out at the right. Directly she is gone, the window at the left of the fireplace flies open, and the PRINCE, with drawn sword in his hand, leaps over the sill. He peers about the room, then, hearing GRETCHEN returning, conceals himself in the

great box at the left. Just as he has hidden, an evil face—that of JOHANNAS KRAFT—looks in at the window as GRETCHEN reënters, calling backward as she comes.]

GRETCHEN

Hans, when the fire in the kitchen burns,
Bring hither a fresh log and blow the flame.
Why, what is this? The casement opened wide:
The wind is surely fierce to break the clasp!
I pity all who walk abroad this day.

[As she is closing the window, the same face appears again.]

Ach, Saints of Heaven, what was that? Hans, Hans!
[HANS comes running in.]

HANS

What is it, Granny? Why, you're white as death!

GRETCHEN

[Sits trembling on the settle.]

Go shut the window, shut the window, quick!

[HANS closes the window with difficulty against the wind.]

Methought I saw a face, an evil face,
Pressing itself against the darkened pane.

HANS

Nay, I see nothing, Granny, save the snow
Flying so thick before the driving wind.

GRETCHEN

I saw it, no one can gainsay me that!
Just such a face as I've long looked to see
Peer through the blackness of a winter's storm.

HANS

Shall I go call the Master, for I hear
Him stirring in the room above?

GRETCHEN

No, no.

Whate'er was there is gone: we'll not disturb
The Toymaster, nor frighten Ursula.

HANS

Then sit up, Ursula is at the door,
She's risen early for a stormy morn.

[URSULA comes in.]

GRETCHEN

Why, how now, Ursula, you're up betimes?

URSULA

The Toymaster worked here till midnight tolled,
For Christmas time is near, and many things
Are still unfinished—

[She yawns.]

Yet I do not love
To rise at dawn and fall to making toys.

[She puts on her apron and draws forth her stool.]

HANS

[Sitting down and falling to work.]

There are a hundred spotted dogs to make,
And only fifty done!

URSULA

I wonder, Hans,
How you can sit there, painting spotted dogs,
Day after day, and keep your patience still!

HANS

Nay, some day I'll make more than spotted dogs—

[With a sigh.]

I would that I could learn to make them squeak.

URSULA

Are squeaks so hard? I've seen the Toymaster
Work but a minute and a wooden lamb
Would bleat, or a bright-painted cock would crow.

HANS

The Toymaster is not like you and me.

[The TOYMASTER comes in. He is a gray-haired man, with a young and gentle face.]

TOYMASTER

So here you children sit and do me shame,
Working like bees, while I have lain abed
And slept so long!

URSULA

Nay, it is not yet dawn.
We thought to shew you how much work was done,
And new toys finished for the Children's Fair.

TOYMASTER

'Tis true, indeed, that Market Day is near,
And much to do. 'Twill be no fault of Hans
If every child in all of this broad land
Has not a brand-new toy on Christmas Day.

That hammer of his tap-taps,—tap-taps away
Like a woodpecker in the great pine tree.

GRETCHEN

I'll brew your porridge, sir, I had not thought
You'd be astir so early.

TOYMASTER

What's amiss?

Why, Gretchen, one would think you'd seen a ghost.

HANS

She saw—

[GRETCHEN *makes him a sign to be still.*]

GRETCHEN

Nay, sir, 'twas nothing of import.
A poor old dame has fancies now and then.

[*She goes out. The TOYMASTER puts on a leather apron, sits down on the settle and begins to work.*]

TOYMASTER

Ursula, have you seen my great long shears?



URSULA

No, Hans and I have sought them high and low
In vain. I'll look again—

TOYMASTER

Nay, these will do.
For if the shears must choose to lose themselves,
There's naught we can do further, merely wait
And some day they will find themselves once more.

HANS

You know, I think the fairies take our shears,
And knives and needles—take them for their games,
And then forget to bring them back again.

URSULA

Hans always talks of fairies, just as though
There were such things in truth.

TOYMASTER

Well, Ursula,
How know you there are not?

HANS

She does not know.

URSULA

But are there, Toymaster?

TOYMASTER

I think there are.

Fairies of good and ill, of joy and pain.
Some people call them fancies, but their name
Means little—wiser folk like Hans and me
Know they are fairies.

URSULA

And have you seen them?

HANS

Some days when I have sat here long alone—

URSULA

Making your spotted dogs—

TOYMASTER

Ay, making dogs,
And building palaces among the clouds.

HANS

'Tis so! My thoughts can wander far away
While I am carving out those four straight legs.



Some days, I say, when I have sat here long,
Watching the sunshine creep across the floor
Or fire-lit shadows flicker on the wall;
Why, then my fancies grow so real and bold
They all come dancing out before my eyes;
I see them—not so plain as I see you
And Ursula—but vaguely, through a dream.
Then what care I how long and dull the task
When such brave fancies come to play with me?

URSULA

And is it so with you, Toymaster, too?

HANS

I know it is, for often, as he works,
There is a gay light growing in his eyes
Brought there by fancies that have naught to do
With prancing hobby-horse or Noah's arks.

TOYMASTER

And I think Ursula, too, has her dreams,
When she sits thus, watching the snow-flakes fly,
The brown leaves whirling in the autumn wind,
Or wild geese winging northward in the Spring.

URSULA

Yes, thus I watch and dream, of whence they came
And whither go, and wonder too, if I
Shall some day see the lands that they have seen.

[GRETCHEN *hobbles in, bringing the TOYMASTER
his breakfast.*]

GRETCHEN

[*Tartly.*]

And while you watch and dream, the porridge burns,
Dust gathers, and your kerchief goes unhemmed.

[*She flounces out.*]

TOYMASTER

Nay, do not hang your head, 'tis not so oft
Your hands lie idle and your thoughts run wild.

HANS

When Ursula works with me for an hour
As much is done as I do in a day.

URSULA

And yet, dear Hansel, you go plodding on,
And by the year's end do your share and mine.

TOYMASTER

'Tis but that Hans can think and dream, and yet
Can keep his fingers busy at their tasks;
For nimble fingers oft make nimble wits.

[He holds up a finished toy animal.]

Lay this brave creature yonder in the chest.

HANS

*[Taking the toy and going toward the box where
the PRINCE is hidden.]*

Which one, Toymaster?

TOYMASTER

[Indicating the other box.]

Here beside the door.

The other is empty, would that it were filled.

HANS

It will be, sir, before the Market Day.

[He deposits the toy and returns to his work.]

URSULA

What do you think of as you tap away
With busy hammer, as you dream and smile?

HANS

I think of laughter, sunshine, colors bright,
Of singing birds, music and dancing feet,
Of blossoming fields and droning honey-bees,
White petals scattering in the warm Spring winds.
And as I muse and dream my fairy fancies,
Or fancied fairies—call them what you will—
Grow real, take shape and dance before my eyes.

TOYMASTER

And what do you see, Ursula, when you dream?

URSULA

I dream about a Prince, a Fairy Prince,
Who shall come hither from some distant land
And bear me far away—a dream so vague
That never can I hope to see it real.

HANS

And you, Toymaster, what is it you dream?

TOYMASTER

Nothing but toys, my little Hans.



URSULA

Just toys?

Nay, but that cannot be; no one can see
The shining of your eyes as you work there,
And think it all could come from painted toys.
You must dream of the past.

TOYMASTER

[*Sharply.*]

No, never that!

I think of those who fetch my toys away;
Of all the children who will play with them—
Some little ailing one who smiles again
Because the jumping-jack holds up its arms,
Some lonely little girl who hugs the doll
That fills her hungry heart, some sleepy boy
With Noah's Ark beside him in the bed,
For fear perhaps another flood should come.
And so we dream, Hansel of all things gay,
Dancing and laughter, Ursula of a Prince,
And I of children happy with my toys.
Now while the storm-wind shakes the window-panes
And cheerful glows the fire on the hearth,
And while your tasks grow long and seem to lag,

Let us draw close together, call our dreams
Out from the hidden cupboards of our hearts;
Bid all our fancies now come trooping forth
And turn them into fairies.

URSULA

If we can.

HANS

Of course we can if so the Master says.

[They work in silence, URSULA drops her hands upon her lap and begins to dream. HANS has a far-away look, but plods on at his task. The TOYMASTER is gazing at the fire, his fingers, however, moving busily. The room grows a little darker as though the storm had closed down thicker than ever. Then out from corners, from behind the clock, from back of the door and out of the big box at the right, comes a troop of laughing, dancing little Pierrots and Columbines, carrying garlands and pelting one another with flowers—these are HANS' fancies. There is low music, hushed laughter, as though all the sounds came from far away. They dance about HANS,

beckoning to him, smiling, he smiles in return but does not move from his stool or stop his work. Then the Pierrots retire a little to make room for the TOYMASTER'S fancies, who come running out through the great fireplace. They are all little boys and girls, some in night-clothes, some in rags, some richly dressed, all carrying toys of various kinds. One little fellow climbs on the rocking horse and gallops like mad, another, a rosy cherub in a nightgown, scrambles on the TOYMASTER'S knee and exhibits the gymnastic talents of a Jumping-Jack. There is a sound of voices and subdued whispering, the patter of many feet, but one must strain the ears to hear it. Then, when these are a little withdrawn, the great chest at the left opens and the PRINCE leaps out. URSULA watches him, fascinated, he moves across the stage, bows low before her and raises her hand to his lips.

URSULA

[Springing up with a cry.]

He touched my hand!

[At the sound of her voice, the fancy children

scatter, run back into the fireplace, behind the clock, back into the chest at the right which closes noiselessly. The PRINCE lingers to the last; it is GRETCHEN's noisy entrance that drives him once more into his hiding place. The cover drops with a bang. GRETCHEN comes in.]

GRETCHEN

Alack, good Toymaster,
Yan Kief has struggled hither through the snow
Saying his child is sick and you must come.

TOYMASTER

Tell him I will come straightway, fetch my cloak.

GRETCHEN

Nay, sir, you shall not go, it were a sin
For any Christian man to venture forth
In such a storm. 'Tis more than I will bear.

TOYMASTER

Fetch my cloak, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN

Ach, you must not go!
[*She goes out on her errand.*]

TOYMASTER

[At the window.]

'Tis growing lighter and the hungry wind
Blows now a shade less fierce. I'll not be long.
Poor Yan Kief's baby, sore he needs my help.
Hans, while I'm gone take care of Ursula.

HANS

I will.

TOYMASTER

And Gretchen will take care of you.
*[GRETCHEN has come in with the cloak, and
mutters and grumbles as she helps him into it.]*

GRETCHEN

In snow knee-deep—To leave us all alone—
Hark to the wind—You shall not go.

TOYMASTER

Farewell!

*[He goes out through the door at the right, the dog,
at the last moment, rushing out of the kitchen
and following him.]*

*[GRETCHEN, shaking her head, goes back to the
kitchen.]*

URSULA

[Who has stood all this time as though dazed.]

Hans, did you see the Prince? He touched my hand,
He must be real.

HANS

Yes, yes, I saw him too;
But you saw not my fancies nor did I
See the Toymaster's.

URSULA

He, too, saw the Prince.
I cannot understand. Where did he go?

HANS

Nay, that I saw not.

URSULA

Ah, he vanished too!
He must have been a fairy like the rest.
Would that he had been real!

[GRETCHEN comes in.]

GRETCHEN

Now, what is this?
Idle so soon as the Toymaster's gone!
[The children run back to their stools and begin

*working busily. . GRETCHEN establishes herself
on the settle with her knitting.]*

No man should tempt him forth on such a night,
The very ravens do not dare to fly!

HANS

He said that he would soon be back again.

GRETCHEN

'Tis past my patience, when he sits all day,
Making and mending toys as is his trade,
That all the folk around flock to his door,
Bringing their troubles, that he mend them too.

HANS

But, Granny, think how once he mended ours!

GRETCHEN

Ah me! so safe we are, I do forget,
Our misery before he came.

[She sits musing a moment.]

To work!

[She falls to knitting busily.]

URSULA

Dear Gretchen, this were a good time indeed
That you should—

GRETCHEN

Bless the child, do I not know
What she would say! Is it a story then
You want?

URSULA

Yes.

HANS

Yes, and so do I.

GRETCHEN

But, dear heart, every one of my poor tales
Is older than that pine tree by the door,
That was not young a hundred years ago!
Which will you choose?

BOTH

[With one voice.]

How the Toymaster came.

GRETCHEN

But you have heard that tale a score of times,
And know each single word long ere it comes.

HANS

Who cares for that? We'll hear it once again.

URSULA

And pray begin it, as you sometimes do,
"In just so wild and fierce a storm as this—"

GRETCHEN

Well, well, I must give in, but mind your work
The while you listen! In just such a storm,
When snow piled high and wind shrieked through
keyholes,
And, in the forest, tall trees rocked and groaned,
While through the night one heard the far wolves
howl,
Late in the night—

[She pauses to change needles.]

HANS

The Toymaster came hither.

GRETCHEN

All wrapped in furs, his great fur cap pulled low,
His head bent to the blast, and at his side
A mighty war-horse such as kings might ride,
Following his voice, came stepping through the
snow,
And at his heels came plodding a great dog,
The grand-sire to that dog that dwells here now.

HANS

The great steed's bridle rang with golden bells,
The stirrups both were silver shod.

GRETCHEN

It bore,
Bound to the saddle, a stout oaken chest,
Hinged, clasped and locked with metal.

*[The children nudge each other and point to the
identical chest, standing against the wall near
the front of the stage.]*

There it stands.

He bore a burden too, that stirred and wailed,
Wrapped though it was in cloak of fur and wool,
And held tight in his mighty arms.



URSULA

'Twas I

He carried!

GRETCHEN

[Tired of being interrupted.]

Then you tell the tale.

URSULA

Nay, nay, dear Gretchen, I should never know,
Had you not told me, who it was he bore.

GRETCHEN

Thus came they through the forest, storm and snow;
And the good angels led them to my door.
It was the night that little Hans was born,
The night his mother went to Paradise.

HANS

Oh, Granny, then you heard the golden bells!

GRETCHEN

The wind dropped for a moment, all was still,
So still I feared to breathe, then faint and far,
So faint at first it seemed to be a dream,
I heard the jingle of those bridle bells.

URSULA

You set the candle in the window then
To light us through the dark.

HANS

While she and I
Sat there beside the fire, it seemed, for years.

GRETCHEN

You know the story well indeed, you two!

URSULA

Ah, it is only that you tell too slow!

GRETCHEN

We waited long, a knock came at the door,
In came the stranger, powdered thick with snow,
And laid his burden down beside the fire;
I knew then the good Saints had sent me aid.
And so it was the dear Toymaster came.

HANS

And never, never went away again!

GRETCHEN

He sold the silver and the bells of gold,
And bought this cottage which I tend for him,

And where he makes and mends the children's toys.
The good horse died of old age, years ago,
The oaken chest stands there beside the door,
And here are you and Hans and here am I,
While he, once more, is out there in the snow
Doing good deeds to all that cry their need.
And so that ends the tale.

HANS

A goodly one!

GRETCHEN

The children, for his skill in making toys,
Call him the Toymaster—no other name
Have we to give him, so we use it too.

URSULA

Gretchen, is he my father?

GRETCHEN

None can tell.

No word has passed his lips of whence he came,
Or who he is; and no man dares to ask.

URSULA

But who think you he is?

GRETCHEN

Nay, I think naught!

URSULA

You do, I see it. Tell me what you think.

GRETCHEN

I know naught, but I fear—that there will come,
Some day a messenger, through storm and dark
To bid you and the Toymaster return.

URSULA

To take us back to our own land again?

HANS

No, this is your own land and this your home.
You know no other.

URSULA

But I dream of one!

Where skies are soft, and meadows, smooth and green,
Lie smiling in the sun the whole year through.
No rugged hills, no storms of wind and snow,
No shivering nights, no rattling window-panes,

No weary toy-making from dawn to dark;
For I would dwell as some great lady there.
I would that messenger might come to-day!

HANS

You would not leave us?

URSULA

But you should come too,
Dwell in my house, and rest and take your ease.

GRETCHEN

And would you take us from our own dear land
Of rushing streams, of towering pine-clad hills,
And glittering snow-peaks, shining in the sun?

HANS

I'll stay here, by your leave, and still make toys.
I need no life of peace and rest and ease;
Time would be one long Sunday, full of yawns!
Some day my fingers shall have skill like his,
And folk will come from far to buy my wares,
Because the Toymaster taught me my trade.

URSULA

And you would sit here, mending broken toys,
When you might be lord of a far, fair land?

HANS

This land is fair enough, and such a lord
As I would be, were better making toys.

GRETCHEN

The lad is right, for us poor, simple folk,
This life is best, yet I should like to see
That strange, far land of yours before I die!

URSULA

That you shall! Oft in driving storms like this,
Or in the dreaming Springtime, when the air
Is full of life and change and rustling wings;
Then sure am I that one will come to lead
Me back to my own land.

GRETCHEN

Ah, if he comes,
'Twill be like the good Master, through the snow
And storm and darkness.

URSULA

Gretchen, what was that?

GRETCHEN

I heard naught.

URSULA

I heard footsteps in the snow.

[A sharp knock is heard at the outer door.]

GRETCHEN

Eh, what did I say, through the storm and
dark,

The messenger is here. Alack, come in.

*[She opens the door, and a muffled man covered
with snow, enters, showing as he turns, the same
evil face that, earlier, looked in at the window.]*

GRETCHEN bustles about, stirring the fire, etc.]

You're welcome!

[Suddenly recognizing him.]

Ach! I've seen that face before,
Peer in the window yonder, through the dark.
He is a thief, come here to rob, and knows
The master is from home.

THE STRANGER

I am no thief!

I bear a message to my lady here,
And to that man you call the Toymaster.

URSULA

To me?

STRANGER

Are you the Lady Ursula?

URSULA

My name is Ursula, I never knew—

STRANGER

[Bowing low.]

My homage, madam. I have come from far
To bear you news.

URSULA

And fetch me home again?

HANS

The stranger says he is a messenger
From your own land, but he may be a thief.
How may we know, then, if he speaks the truth?

STRANGER

See you that oaken chest beside the door?
Have you the key thereto?

URSULA

Nay, I have not.

STRANGER

[Producing key from his pouch.]
Then try this in the lock and look within.

URSULA

I cannot look, to touch it is forbid.

STRANGER

Forbid? Why, then, know this; in your own land
'Tis you will bid and all men must obey.
[He puts the key in the lock.]

URSULA

But here within this house another rules,
And for the love I bear the Toymaster,
I still will do his bidding.

[She walks resolutely away. GRETCHEN tries the key.]

GRETCHEN

It fits, it turns!

STRANGER

That which within the chest is lying hid
Is not the Toymaster's, nor has he right
To say who shall or shall not look within.
For all that lies therein is yours, yes, yours,
Waiting long years until you lift the lid.

GRETCHEN

Hers, say you? Little Ursula's? Why then,
Surely we may look in! 'Tis many times
I've felt that I would die could I not know
What lay within the chest. Come, Ursula.

URSULA

What say you, Hans?

HANS

I say let it alone.
The Toymaster knows best.

STRANGER

But there's no harm

In just a peep.

[URSULA comes slowly forward and lays her hand on the key, then draws away.]

URSULA

No, Hans is right indeed,
The Toymaster knows best and he said "No."

[GRETCHEN feels the lid and finds that it gives.]

GRETCHEN

But this is more than mortal heart can bear,
To wait a moment longer when so near
We are to seeing.

[She lifts the lid a little.]

Tis open, Ursula.

[URSULA makes no protest and GRETCHEN flings the cover wide open.]

And what is this? Oh, see, my lady, see!

[She lifts from the chest a long cloak of shimmering silk, edged with ermine. The STRANGER takes it and throws it about URSULA's shoulders. Then he and GRETCHEN bring forth other treasures, a jeweled girdle, a necklace, a glittering

star. They put them all upon URSULA, who stands wondering.]

URSULA

Can all of these be mine?

STRANGER

Ay, more than these,
In that far country whither you must go.

GRETCHEN

Ah, see the glowing jewels, how they shine,
And how her mantle sweeps along the floor!

URSULA

Run, Gretchen, run, and fetch a looking glass.

[She preens herself like a young peacock.

GRETCHEN brings the glass.]

Alack, that little thing! 'Tis far too small,
It shows my splendor only here and there.
Light yonder candle, blow the others out,
And let me watch my shadow on the wall.

*[GRETCHEN places a candle on the work-bench,
and URSULA studies her shadow, posing as she
walks up and down.]*

URSULA

'Tis thus I will come down the banquet hall,
Bowling to right and left—

*[She stops aghast. The door has opened and the
TOYMASTER is standing silent in the candle
light.]*

TOYMASTER

[Quietly.]

What have we here?

*[There is an awful silence, then GRETCHEN
steps forward curtsying.]*

GRETCHEN

Please, sir, I opened—

[She chokes and cannot go on.]

URSULA

I permitted it.

*[The TOYMASTER pays little attention to them,
but is gazing at the STRANGER who has retired
into the shadow.]*

TOYMASTER

Who is that hiding yonder in the dark?

STRANGER

[Coming forward.]

I am not hiding, I am—

TOYMASTER

Yea, I know,

Could I forget your face, Johannas Kraft,
And all it means? What mischief make you here?

JOHANNAS

I have come here to bring you weighty news.
The King is dead!

TOYMASTER

Ah, so, the King is dead?

That should mean much. And now your news is
given,

You may go hence.

[Johannas goes toward the door, obeying in spite of himself, but issuing his defiance as he stands upon the threshold.]

JOHANNAS

I warn you, sir,

Your hiding place has been found out at last.

My followers are waiting not far off;
They have my promise, ere this night to see
Her who should sit upon the dead King's throne.

[He goes out.]

GRETCHEN

[Repeating in an awe-struck whisper.]

“Her who should sit upon the dead King's throne.”

[She goes out, curtseying low to URSULA, who stands lost in wonder. HANS bows awkwardly and follows.]

URSULA

Ah, dear, dear Toymaster, can you forgive
My breaking your command?

TOYMASTER

’Tis not for me
To give commands to you. The time has come
When you must learn who we are, you and I;
You must have patience, now, to hear a tale
Longer than any ever Gretchen told.

[He sits down upon the settle, URSULA kneels beside him, his arm about her.]

URSULA

I've heard a thousand times how we came here,
But no word ever whence we came, and why.

TOYMASTER

'Twas from a country full of life and light,
Of fertile fields, broad, slowly-running streams,
Where flowers bloom and fade and bloom again,
The whole year through.

URSULA

Will we go back once more?

TOYMASTER

You will go back, but ah, would that my eyes
Should never see that evil land again!

URSULA

Evil, and it so fair?

TOYMASTER

Men call it fair!

*[He falls to musing. URSULA finally touches
his arm to rouse him.]*

URSULA

Dear Toymaster, that is not all the tale?

TOYMASTER

Within the royal palace once there lived
A man with strange, wild thoughts and burning
heart;

Poor fellow, he was brother to the King.
That King—but we have heard “The King is dead,”
What use to tell of all the wrong he did,
Of how his people groaned beneath his rule,
And shed their blood upon his endless wars.
He had a son—a happy care-free lad,
He had a Queen—an angel, true as gold;
His son learned evil, perished in a brawl,
The Queen’s heart, torn with pain, broke, and she
died.

URSULA

But what has this to do with you and me?

TOYMASTER

She left a baby daughter, three years old,
Who had her mother’s brave and steadfast eyes,
Her mother’s spirit, too, shone out through them,

And she was left, sole heiress to the King,
To sit, some day, upon his tottering throne.
They called her—

URSULA

Ursula?

TOYMASTER

Yes, Ursula,
Princess and heiress to a noble realm!

URSULA

But why—how—? Nay, I cannot understand!

TOYMASTER

That brother of the King saw matters grow
From bad to worse; he saw her baby heart
Compassed about with evil, though he fought
For her, yet all his wisdom, all his strength
Could not suffice—he was not brave enough.
And so, dear heart, he did what cowards do,
He fled away.

URSULA

A coward? Never that!
My Toymaster, was that King's brother you?

TOYMASTER

Yea, it was I, my little Ursula.
May Heaven forgive, if I have done you wrong;
I could not drive the evil from your life,
So in my arms I bore you far away.

URSULA

And was the road so long and perilous
As Gretchen oft has said it must have been?

TOYMASTER

Soldiers pursued, a price was on my head,
We left the smiling plains and wandering streams
Mounted the hills, pushed through the trackless
woods,
Until the air grew thin and cold and clear—
A land where men can breathe and live again.

URSULA

And there you found Hans and his old Grand-dame
And lived here ever after—making toys.

TOYMASTER

I lived here watching your fair mother's soul
Blossom again before my sad old eyes.

I saw a noble lady, steadfast, brave,
And true as steel, grow up to womanhood.

URSULA

And I betrayed your trust, broke your command,
Opened the chest—

TOYMASTER

Nay, do not fret for that.

When I came in, saw you appareled thus,
Studying your shadow, saw that evil face
Peer through the dark—then had I but one thought,
This is the last time little Ursula
Will be a child, her land is calling her
To come and be a woman and a Queen!

URSULA

Ah, that word frightens me! To be a Queen?

TOYMASTER

The King is dead, thus spoke Johannas Kraft,
And you must sit upon your father's throne.

[With sudden fire.]

Ah, Ursula, my child, will you forget
What you have learned here, honor, truth and love?

When you see evil, treachery and guile
Ring you so close it seems you cannot break
Their fateful compass? Will your heart be brave
To bear you through, and break their crushing bonds?

URSULA

Never, Toymaster, never in my life
Will I forget what now I promise you—
To be upright and gentle, true of heart,
What you, through these long years, have been to me.

TOYMASTER

You must have higher courage, dear, than mine,
I could not face the ill, and fled away.
Will your brave heart ne'er falter in its task
To be a true Queen, steadfast to the end?

URSULA

[*Her hands in his, repeating the promise.*]
To be a true Queen, steadfast to the end.
[*GRETCHEN hurries in, followed by HANS.*]

GRETCHEN

There stands outside the door a group of men,

They have long swords and great dark flying
cloaks,

I know not what to think!

*[They all look to the TOYMASTER for orders, he
looks to URSULA.]*

URSULA

Bid them come in.

*[GRETCHEN opens the door, JOHANNAS KRAFT
and his followers come trooping in, a dark-faced
sinister band. The fire light shines upon their
weapons as they come crowding in. URSULA
gazes at them half in wonder, half in terror.]*

Can these be they who come to lead me forth,
To my own land, to reign in royal state?
I thought there would come heralds, courtiers,
knights,

Flaunting my colors in pine-scented winds;
That silver trumpets would blow forth the news
To all the world that Ursula was Queen.
But now I see dark faces, lowering brows,
On every side I see hard cruel eyes
Peer into mine, fierce, glittering, like their swords.
What mean they? Toymaster, stand by my side.

JOHANNAS

[Advancing and dropping upon his knee.]

Madame, your courtiers greet their new-found Queen.

[With a clash, the men raise their swords in salute, then lower them and kneel also. JOHANNAS lifts URSULA'S hand to his lips.]

URSULA

It was not thus my dream-Prince kissed my hand!

CURTAIN

ACT II

Four months elapse between Acts I and II

A small walled garden adjoining the palace of Princess URSULA. At the right, up two or three steps, is a door leading into the palace; at the back, the garden wall with trees above it. At the left, the garden wall also, and, opposite the palace door, an arched gateway, with a small bench alongside it for the sentry's use. A garden bench and table stand some distance from the wall at the front of the stage on the left. All around the garden and palace walls grow flowers, blooming shrubs, tall clumps of white lilies, blossoming vines climbing upward. Even the trees above the wall are blooming. The time is early twilight of a spring evening. As the curtain rises, two sentries stand, one at either side of the steps leading up to the palace door. JOHANNAS KRAFT, dressed in all the gorgeousness due his office of Lord High Councillor, comes in at the gate, crosses the court, returns the sentries' respectful salute with the slightest of nods, and disappears into the palace. When he is gone, the dignified attitude of the sentries changes quickly, the first one lounges, and the second turns to stare after the Councillor.

SECOND SENTRY

The blackest rascal in this land.

FIRST SENTRY

Save one;

Nicholas Halm is one shade worse than he.

SECOND SENTRY

But not so clever as Johannas Kraft,
For he goes first, the other follows close,
While ruin, war and treason come behind.

[NICHOLAS HALM comes through the gate and enters the palace with even more pomp and majesty than JOHANNAS KRAFT.]

FIRST SENTRY

[Burlesquing his manner.]

Room there for Nicholas Halm!

SECOND SENTRY

Ay, ay, make room.

And smell the brimstone as he passes by.

FIRST SENTRY

Now that fair truth and justice rule this land,

These two are last of many evil things
That Princess Ursula has driven hence.

*[A sad-faced PEASANT WOMAN and two children,
one of them crying, cross the court and attempt
to enter the palace.]*

This, madam, is the private palace-door;
Only great lords and nobles enter here.

PEASANT WOMAN

Ah, sir, good sir, I pray you, let me in,
For I am in such need; have journeyed far
To ask for aid. Throughout the land we know
That all may come to Princess Ursula.

SECOND SENTRY

Yea, comrade, she is right, let her go in.

[The PEASANT WOMAN goes into the palace.]

FIRST SENTRY

A hundred such come hither every day,
And yet our lady deigns to see them all.
She rights their wrongs, turns all their tears to
smiles,
Harks eagerly to every piteous tale—

While there behind her throne, like grinning skulls
Stand those two rogues, her father's councillors,
Johannas Kraft of sly and active wit
And Nicholas Halm, fat, greedy, obstinate.
Pray Heaven they'll not prevail.

*[The AMBASSADOR from Astancia, followed by
his servants, comes through the gate and enters
the palace.]*

SECOND SENTRY

Who may that be?

FIRST SENTRY

Some noble lord, sent from Astancia.
Men whisper that he summons us to war.

SECOND SENTRY

We fought Astancia for ten long years
And had at last concluded peace—

FIRST SENTRY

They say
The terms of peace have not been fairly kept
And we are summoned to account.

SECOND SENTRY

I vow

'Tis some new villainy of yonder two
Who are the source of every ill we know.
No wonder Princess Ursula is sad;
It is no gentle task to be a Queen.

[GRETCHEN comes out of the palace. She is more richly dressed than in Act I, but her manner is much subdued. The sentries bow.]

GRETCHEN

Give over bowing, mock me not, my lords,
A poor dame all unused to courtly ways.

FIRST SENTRY

Yet, madam, you are here of high degree,
First lady-in-waiting to her Majesty!

GRETCHEN

Ay, that I have been, and of that I'm proud,
Since Princess Ursula was three years old,
I've tended her in my poor awkward way.
I slapped her fingers once, ah, woe is me,
To strike a Princess!

SECOND SENTRY

'Tis an honor that
Johannas Kraft must oft have envied you,
To judge by that black, scowling face of his
When Princess Ursula withstands his will.

*[The old GARDENER comes in, he limps, leans
upon a stick and speaks in a high, cracked voice.
He bears a great armful of blossoms.]*

GARDENER

Here are the flowers that my lady loves,
And that her mother, bless her, loved before.

GRETCHEN

You knew her mother?

GARDENER

Ay, and loved her well!
King, Queen, King's brother, yes, I knew them all.
'Tis many and many I've seen come and go.
Folk now would turn me off, I am so old;
Yet I've a friend in Princess Ursula.
Tell her I chose each flower myself.

GRETCHEN

I will.

She says there's naught that gives her pleasure now
But blossoms opened by the warm Spring sun,
And smiles that come to faces worn and sad.

FIRST SENTRY

She sees enough of those.

GARDENER

May Heaven bless

The good that she has done throughout this land.

*[The PEASANT WOMAN comes out smiling, her
children laughing and the smaller one hugging a
doll.]*

FIRST SENTRY

Is all well?

PEASANT WOMAN

Yea, sir, all is well indeed,
Our Princess has a heart made of pure gold!

CHILD

[Shyly.]

And see, she gave me this. She said that once
She used to make such dolls for little girls.

GRETCHEN

Ay, that she did, with fingers swift and sure;
Yet often, often, would she stop to dream
Of being a Princess.

PEASANT WOMAN

While I spoke with her
Two dark-faced men were whispering in her ear,
But she seemed dreaming, gazing far away
As though she heard them not. I wondered then
What did those vague eyes see.

GRETCHEN

—A rushing stream
Pour down a mountain-side—a stately pine
Two centuries old, beside a cottage door.
She saw a work-room, low, with blackened beams;
She saw an old man and a little boy
Before the fire, busy making toys.

GARDENER

How know you that?

GRETCHEN

Do not my poor old eyes
See that same vision each night when I sleep?

We know, the Princess Ursula and I,
How the heart turns, in trouble, toward its home.

[*The PEASANT WOMAN goes out with her children.*]

GARDENER

She is in trouble now, and all her land
Must suffer also, if this war shall come.

SECOND SENTRY

But why a war?

GARDENER

Ah, my old tongue tells naught
But I know why Astancia cries for war!

[*Motioning off GRETCHEN's importunate curiosity.*]

Nay, nay, good woman, ask me not, I say,
But ask that villain there beside the throne.
What of that youth, that pleasant, likely lad
Who roamed this garden but a year ago?
A Prince, the King's son from Astancia,
As pledge he came, as hostage of the peace;
And we could work him ill, if they did ill,
And we must treat him well, if they did well.

FIRST SENTRY

And they have kept their terms.

GARDENER

Ay, but have we?

Where is that Prince, where is he gone, I say?

There's no man knows, except Johannas Kraft.

[Princess URSULA comes out of the palace, followed by JOHANNAS and NICHOLAS. Those already present bow and withdraw. URSULA sits down on the bench.]

URSULA

Now I would have you tell me once for all

How does Astancia dare to threaten war?

JOHANNAS

With reverence, my lady, let me say

A woman's mind must fail to grasp these things.

URSULA

A woman's mind may sometimes see what men's

Dull eyes had thought safe hid.

JOHANNAS

[*Patiently.*]

I will renew

The argument once more and make you see
Their claim is baseless.

URSULA

Make me if you can!

JOHANNAS

Within your father's time there was a war—

URSULA

Yes, yes, a senseless war, that wasted lands,
Spilled my good people's blood, and all for naught.

NICHOLAS

'Twas not for naught. We hoped to spread our
bounds,
And fill our coffers up with their bright gold.

URSULA

In that you failed.

JOHANNAS

'Tis true we nearly failed;

But just as victory lay within their grasp,
A pestilence swept half their host away,
So peace was made.

NICHOLAS

It was a cunning peace;
He had a hand in it!

URSULA

That I doubt not!

JOHANNAS

We made the terms, a hostage should be given,
The King's own son, to dwell here in our land,
A pledge that they would never over-run
Our borders, never threaten us again.
They kept their pledge, but—

URSULA

Have we, sir, kept ours?
Where is the hostage who was here to dwell
Safe and in honor while the peace should last?
Where is he gone, I ask you?

NICHOLAS

We know not.

URSULA

You know not, when you vowed to keep him safe?

[There is an uncomfortable pause.]

Bring the Ambassador from Astancia.

JOHANNAS

Madam, his words are false!

URSULA

Have I a proof

That *you* speak truth? No, I will treat with him.

[JOHANNAS and NICHOLAS go into the palace, their heads together in earnest consultation. They meet GRETCHEN and the GARDENER who are bringing out a basket of flowers.]

GARDENER

[Jerking his thumb over his shoulder.]

A pretty pair of rogues, that precious two;

Well matched, but—

[Coming closer to URSULA and speaking in confidence.]

Not a match for you and me.

URSULA

What do you mean?

GARDENER

Ah, there are things I know
That only old men know—and do not tell!
That vanished Prince, he was a pleasant lad.
We were fast friends through those years he dwelt
here.
Sometimes he broke my plants, but I forgave
The harm he did—he had a merry heart.

URSULA

Where is he now?

GARDENER

Nay, that I cannot tell.
But in your hour of need, count on my aid.

GRETCHEN

*[To the GARDENER as he retires from URSULA's
side.]*

For shame, you speak with too familiar tongue.

GARDENER

An old man, who knows much, forgets to bow.

*[GRETCHEN comes forward and presents her
flowers with a low curtesy.]*

URSULA

Nay, Gretchen, do not bow, surely your bones
Like not the task after so many years.

GRETCHEN

Madam, in truth, my old joints cry aloud
Whene'er I bend them.

URSULA

Bend to me no more.
I will not have your curtesies. Have you heard
Word lately of our Toymaster?

GRETCHEN

Ah, no,
I would I had!

URSULA

I would that he were here,
I need him, Gretchen, need to hear his voice,
See his kind eyes, touch his warm, steady hand.
How far away he seems!

GRETCHEN

He may come yet!

URSULA

How safe, think you, he could be at a Court
From which he stole its Princess long ago?

[JOHANNAS and NICHOLAS return with the
AMBASSADOR. GRETCHEN goes into the palace.

URSULA greets the AMBASSADOR.]

Sir, I would hear the message that you bring.

AMBASSADOR

I come to make a charge of wrong and guile,
Of treachery, and broken terms of peace—

[JOHANNAS tries to interrupt.]

URSULA

Speak on, for I will hear your message through.

AMBASSADOR

We sent a hostage, our own ruler's son,
Pledge of our promises to spare your land.
Our King grows old, longs for his son again
And would in other ways secure the peace.

NICHOLAS

Would he give gold, gold, fill our coffers up
And make us rich again?

JOHANNAS

Hush, hush, you fool.

AMBASSADOR

Lately an ugly rumor reached our ears
That our young Prince has come to secret harm.
We asked, we threatened, but no answer came!
The army of Astancia draws near,
'Tis not with idle words that we say now
Show us the Prince or see a mighty host
Pour in to take possession of your land.

JOHANNAS

[*Whispering to* URSULA.]

Their strength is four times ours.

URSULA

We'll have no war,
My people shall no longer shed their blood
In endless quarrels that are naught to them.
This question lies between your court and ours,
It is a matter of my father's word.
In honor shall his pledges be fulfilled.

[*To the* AMBASSADOR.]

We will make answer, sir, to your demands
In all good season.

*[The AMBASSADOR bows and retires into the
palace.]*

[Fiercely to JOHANNAS.]

Sir, where is the Prince?
Turn not away, for you shall answer me.

JOHANNAS

Madam, he died in prison.

NICHOLAS

So men think.

JOHANNAS

But none know truly what his fate has been.

URSULA

None know, belike, save you and Nicholas Halm.

JOHANNAS

[Angrily.]

You doubt our honor?

URSULA

That I do, indeed!
You led my father through his last weak years,
But you shall not lead me.

JOHANNAS

I made you Queen.

URSULA

I am no Queen until, in truth, I reign
And guard my people from such men as you.
For long years no one has opposed your will,
The land is filled with witness of your rule—
The time has come at last, Johannas Kraft,
That I will break your will or you break mine:

JOHANNAS

Madam, in truth, you greatly honor me,
Which of us is the stronger, you or I,
All men shall come to know—and soon. Good night.

[He sweeps a low bow and goes out through the gate. The GARDENER, who has been working among the flowers, comes forward as NICHOLAS moves after JOHANNAS.]

GARDENER

Follow your worthy master, Nicholas Halm.

[NICHOLAS scowls blackly and goes out. URSULA does not hear, she is sitting upon the bench with her face buried in her hands. The twilight deepens, faint lights show in the palace windows, music is heard within. The gate opens slowly and the TOYMASTER, worn, weary and covered with dust, comes in. The old GARDENER peers at him through the dusk, then suddenly drops upon his knees and seizes the TOYMASTER'S hand.]

GARDENER

I never thought my eyes should see again
The brother of the King.

TOYMASTER

Nay, dear old friend,
Call me not by a name so long forgot;
'Tis but to see the Princess I am here.

GARDENER

Yonder she sits. Ah, she is sore beset

With pain and trouble.

[He goes out through the gate, shaking his head sorrowfully. The TOYMASTER stands over URSULA and finally touches her shoulder.]

TOYMASTER

Little Ursula!

URSULA

Oh, Toymaster, oh, dear dear Toymaster!

[She springs up, seizes his hands, pushes him into her seat and kneeling before him breaks into sobs.]

TOYMASTER

This is strange fashion for a happy Queen
To greet an ancient friend!

URSULA

Ah, do you think

A Queen is ever happy?

TOYMASTER

Yes, dear heart,

You will be happy yet.

URSULA

No, never here.
Oh for an hour by our own dear hearth,
With you and Hans and Gretchen, making toys!

TOYMASTER

We had some happy hours.

URSULA

Every one
Was happy! Oh, do you recall the day
We saw the fairies, you and Hans and I?

TOYMASTER

We often still see fairies, I and Hans,
Although that tall Prince never came again;
Do you remember him?

URSULA

I've not forgot,
For oft, through the first months that I dwelt here,
He used to come again: these many nights
He's walked with me along the terraces,
We two alone in the white moonlit world.

But now he comes not, for long dragging weeks
I have not seen his face, nor will again.

TOYMASTER

Be not so sure, we'll call our fancies out,
And he may be among them. Take my hands—
But stay, first I must show you that brave gift
That Hans has sent you.

URSULA

Oh, a spotted dog!
[*She hugs it.*]

TOYMASTER

He bade me say he'd learned to make them squeak.
Our Hans will soon be master of his trade.

[*The dog squeaks and sorrowful URSULA cannot
but laugh.*]

Now for the fairies, sweetheart, take my hands.

[*It has grown darker still, the twilight is nearly
at an end. One sees suddenly that the shrubs
are full of fairies, the tall clumps of lilies are
swaying white ladies, in the blossoms on the wall
are faces. There is soft singing, a sound of tiny*

bells like blue-bells chiming, finally all the sounds join in a slow, swinging tune. The PRINCE appears, dropping over the wall. The old GARDENER can be seen outside, peering through the gate. The PRINCE advances boldly this time, he takes URSULA's hand and, to the fairies' singing they go through a stately dance. At the end he is about to speak, when suddenly a great glare of light and the sounds of crashing music come through the open doors of the palace. A strident voice is heard outside.]

VOICE

Room for my noble lord, Johannas Kraft.

[JOHANNAS and NICHOLAS, with servants and courtiers come noisily in at the gate, and go into the palace without seeing the TOYMASTER and URSULA, who stand in shadow. The fairies and the PRINCE have vanished at the first sound of their coming.]

TOYMASTER

They drove our fancies all away.

URSULA

Those two

Drive out all joyful things when they come near.
Between them they have sworn to break my will
And use my rule to screen their treachery.

TOYMASTER

Fight bravely still, true honor will prevail.

URSULA

Ah, you could aid me did you but dwell here,
Stand close beside me, keep me brave of heart,
Will you not stay here always?

TOYMASTER

Should I stay,
One man could whisper in another's ear—
“Our Queen has no real strength, she leans upon
A coward, it is safe to break her rule.”

URSULA

And must I conquer then alone?

TOYMASTER

Alone
Or not at all. Thus must your victory be.
I have come hither but for one short hour,

To see your dear face, Ursula, once more,
Nor linger, lest I come to do you harm.
Farewell, my darling, keep a hopeful heart.

*[He tries to go but she will not let him. She cries
out in a sudden burst of despair.]*

URSULA

Oh take me home, Toymaster, take me home.
Let me give up this game of being Queen,
Oh Toymaster, dear Master, take me home.

TOYMASTER

Dear child, dear child, I cannot take you home,
Your people's bitter need cries out too loud;
While you can serve them, you must be their Queen.

[She still sobs against his knee.]

What was it, Ursula, you promised me?

URSULA

[Rising and smiling wanly.]

"To be a true Queen, steadfast to the end."

*[She goes slowly up the palace steps into the
light. At the door she turns back toward where
he stands watching her.]*

My eyes see clear, I know the way at last.

[She goes into the palace and the TOYMASTER turns sadly away. The GARDENER hurries in through the gate and speaks excitedly.]

GARDENER

Hark, friend, a word; but mind you tell no man.

[He draws the TOYMASTER to the back of the stage and they talk in an earnest but unheard conversation. Meanwhile, a moment after URSULA has entered the palace, a great hubbub has arisen, voices cry out and a crowd of people gathers just within the door. There is a moment of quiet in which are heard—]

JOHANNAS' VOICE

I say, no—never!

URSULA'S VOICE

Ah, but I say yes!

[Confusion arises again, and the gardener, drawn by curiosity, goes up the steps. He almost collides with the AMBASSADOR from Astancia, who comes hurrying down with a red-sealed letter in his hand.]

AMBASSADOR

[As he crosses the stage.]

Who could have thought it—Princess Ursula—

GARDENER

Oh tell me, tell me, sir, what hap is here?

[The AMBASSADOR only shakes his head and goes out the gate. A group of palace servants comes next. They rush across the garden, looking back fearfully.]

In Heaven's name, good sirs, what is amiss?

[They do not answer but go out through the gate. The two sentries come out.]

FIRST SENTRY

She gave her answer to Astancia

And a strange one it was.

SECOND SENTRY

We need not stay;

There is no good in serving longer here.

[They go out together.]

TOYMASTER

Oh, little Ursula, compassed with ill,

What hand can guide you through this maze of wrong?

GARDENER

I thought to find the Prince, but I have failed,
It was a will-o'-the-wisp, an old man's dream.

TOYMASTER

[Suddenly waking from his reverie.]

What say you, friend? I fear I heard you not.

*[JOHANNAS and NICHOLAS come out; they do
not see the TOYMASTER and the GARDENER who
have slipped back into the shadow.]*

NICHOLAS

And have you reasoned with her, used all words
That might prevail?

JOHANNAS

No, she is adamant;
Nothing could shake her, though I talked ten years.

NICHOLAS

And have you shown her that her way means death
To her—

JOHANNAS

And us: therefore she chose that way.

NICHOLAS

I see not why our ruin comes with hers,
Why, we are safe, Johannas, say we are.

JOHANNAS

When she goes forth to meet Astancia
And render up her person for the Prince—
King's daughter for King's son, a fair exchange—
There shall go with her, as a fitting guard—
(For it is so her royal message reads)
The noble councillor, Johannas Kraft,
And his most worthy colleague, Nicholas Halm.
Not all the Saints of Heaven,—if they willed
Could save us, once we fall into those hands.

NICHOLAS

I will not go—I vow I will not go!

JOHANNAS

What will you do?

NICHOLAS

Alack, that I know not.
When once we enter the Astancian land

Our lives are forfeit; no one will believe
We did not slay the Prince.

JOHANNAS

I would we had!

NICHOLAS

What good would come therefrom?

JOHANNAS

Why, all the good
We sought to gain when we attempted it.

NICHOLAS

'Twas a mistake when we imprisoned him.
I was against it from the very first.

JOHANNAS

What, you against it, you who urged it on?
You urged it on and when the lad escaped,
And we, in close pursuit had gone so far
That our own kingdom was left far behind,
When I was willing, then, to leave the chase,
'Twas you who panted still, "Press on, press on,"
"We'll have him yet—"

NICHOLAS

And did we not do well

To follow still?

JOHANNAS

We never found the Prince.

NICHOLAS

But yet we found the Princess Ursula.

JOHANNAS

Ah, 'twas your fault we found her!

NICHOLAS

No, 'twas yours!

You would go on to seek the fleeing Prince.

JOHANNAS

'Tis like he perished in that bitter storm.

NICHOLAS

Brrr, how I shiver yet to think of it!

JOHANNAS

Then think of that glad road we take to-night,
To fair Astancia—think and shiver more.

Nicholas Halm, you have a craven heart,
Stay here and die at your own people's hands,
Stay here and die, or go with her and die,
Choose you the happier end, and now farewell!

NICHOLAS

[In an agony of fear.]

Where go you, where, Johannas? Stay with me.

JOHANNAS

While you have wailed and shuddered, I have
planned,
I have a swift horse hidden near the gate,
And for an hour still the road is safe.

NICHOLAS

Ah, good Johannas, do not leave me here,
Take me hence with you!

JOHANNAS

Hold your peace, you fool,
Speak not so loud, let loose my arm, I say!

[He shakes off NICHOLAS' detaining hand and walks toward the gate. Through the darkness a high, cracked voice cries manfully—]

GARDENER

Who goes there?

[The old man comes out of the shadows, carrying one of the sentries' abandoned pikes.]

JOHANNAS

What, who dares to stay my way?

GARDENER

The guardian of the gate.

JOHANNAS

A pretty guard!

Most worthy of her Majesty the Queen!

Enough of nonsense, stand aside, I say.

[He pushes the GARDENER roughly aside and is advancing to the gate when a new guard, the TOYMASTER, appears, his arms folded, his cloak wrapped close about him.]

TOYMASTER

You go not forth to-night, Johannas Kraft,
Save by the word of Princess Ursula.

JOHANNAS

A vagrant mender of old broken toys!
Go back then to your workshop, think not here
To give commands to a Queen's Councillor.

*[He draws his sword; the TOYMASTER casts
aside his cloak and draws a sword of his own.]*

TOYMASTER

A toy-mender who has not quite forgot
That once he was the brother of the King!

JOHANNAS

There is no crime to lay before my door;
Let me go hence, you know no ill of me,
I ask for proof!

A VOICE THROUGH THE DARKNESS

The proof is close at hand!

*[A dark figure comes out of the shadow, passes
close to them, and goes out through the gate.]*

JOHANNAS

The Prince!

NICHOLAS

A ghost!

TOYMASTER

The fairy Prince again.

[*To the GARDENER.*]

Know you who that was?

GARDENER

An imp, a sprite,

A will-o'-the-wisp that mocked me once before.

[He goes out of the gate, however, muttering to himself and shaking his head. JOHANNAS and NICHOLAS go into the palace. The TOYMASTER sits down and buries his face in his hands.]

TOYMASTER

My Ursula, my little Ursula!

[URSULA comes unnoticed down the steps. She stands beside the TOYMASTER and lays her hand upon his hair.]

URSULA

Dear hair grown white in service of the poor,
Dear hands so worn with mending broken toys,
And broken lives, and bleeding broken hearts,
All things made whole by his strange craftsmanship!

TOYMASTER

Talk not of things made whole, when broken lies
Your fair young life upon the nation's wheel.
For others' evil and for others' good,
The happiness that should be yours is gone.

URSULA

There is no better end, no other way,
In all that maze of wrong, 'twas but one path
Showed clear, the way my feet have trod at last.

*[The TOYMASTER, with his face in his hands, is
unable to answer.]*

Dear Master, will you sometimes think of me,
As you and Hans sit busy making toys,
While Gretchen bustles, scolds, sweeps clean the
hearth,
And good old Beppo sleeps beside the fire,
Will you think then of idle Ursula?

TOYMASTER

My child, think you we ever could forget?

URSULA

[Hesitatingly.]

And should those happy fairies come again,

And with them that fair Prince that we have seen,
That phantom Prince, who now has fled away,
Tell him—tell him that—Princess Ursula—
[*She cannot go on.*]

TOYMASTER

Bade him farewell?

URSULA

Yea, with her heart's dear love.

[*There is silence and a slow, far-off clock begins to strike.*]

Hark to the bell, slow droning through the night,
How few know what a fateful hour tolls!

The time is near.

[*Through the stillness the sound of footsteps, of many marching feet, is heard, faint at first but growing louder. The TOYMASTER hears it and glances anxiously at URSULA. She speaks quietly.*]

Yes, dear, I hear it too.

[*The tramping feet come nearer. URSULA turns to go into the palace.*]

TOYMASTER

I stand by you, my Princess!

URSULA

No, bide here,

My bodyguard shall only be those two

That brought us to this pass. Master, farewell!

[He tries to kiss her hands, but she folds her arms about him as he sits on the bench. They cling to each other for a moment, then she goes into the palace. The tramp of feet ceases as the gate swings open. The GARDENER rushes in.]

GARDENER

[Incoherent with joyful excitement.]

The Army of Astancia is here,

And with them—no, my senses do me wrong,

I am a chattering, foolish, blind old man.

[Before the TOYMASTER can question him, he is followed by two heralds, by courtiers and a line of soldiers. Some of the latter file into the palace and drag forth the reluctant JOHANNAS and the struggling NICHOLAS.]

NICHOLAS

Mercy, mercy, sirs!

[As they reach the gate, they meet the PRINCE just entering.]

PRINCE

Ay, mercy you shall have

In such proportion as you both deserve.

[They are led out. The PRINCE comes forward to the TOYMASTER who regards him with bewilderment.]

TOYMASTER

You came to save her?

PRINCE

No, to bear her hence,
To claim her promise to Astancia.

TOYMASTER

Who are you?

PRINCE

The King's son, the hostage Prince,
Who claims your steadfast Princess, Toymaster.

[The TOYMASTER looks toward the palace door]

CURTAIN

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